REMARKS:

In the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 14-24. Claims 1-13 remain cancelled. No new matter is presented. Thus, claims 14-24 are pending and under consideration. The rejections are traversed below.

REJECTION UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 103(a):

Claims 14-24 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over various combinations of the following: U.S. Patent No. 6,084,685 (Mori), U.S. Patent No. 5,377,016 (Kashiwagi) and U.S. Patent No. 6,687,018 (Leong).

Mori is directed to transmission or reception of data to and from a host device and a multifunction peripheral device in parallel using a time-sharing function. The computer (50) of Mori, which is also referred to as a host device, generates operation command signals for controlling each unit (facsimile unit, printer unit, etc.) provided to the multifunction peripheral device (1) (see, col. 3, lines 55-61 and col. 4, lines 4-10). That is, the computer (50) of Mori includes only a driver (i.e., an activation unit) and does not provide a configuration for receiving a request from a multifunction machine.

Moreover, the information transmitted to the computer (50) in Mori is only image data. For example, the computer (50) controls the scanner unit (16) to read the image data, the printer unit (18) to generate the image data and the facsimile unit (95) to receive and transmit data (see, col. 4, lines 39-48 and col. 6, lines 31-37). That is, Mori is directed to transmitting data between the host device or computer and the multifunction peripheral device based on arrangement of the data as a temporal sequence.

Kashiwagi processes image data provided by an image reading unit and external equipment in a time divisional and parallel manner by implementing a wait function (see, col. 6, lines 34-45). The multiplexer in Kashiwagi switches between processing data of a scanner and data of the external equipment (see, col. 2, lines 52-56). That is, Kashiwagi is limited to suspending one job while performing another succeeding job temporal to implement time division multiplexing.

Leong is directed to distributing print requests submitted by a client to an available printer capable of printing the print job and sending a message to the client (see, col. 6, lines 50-60 and FIG. 6).

The present invention enables multiple different functions (i.e., faxing, printing, etc.,) to be executed by correspondingly assigning requests for such functions to respective multiple multifunction apparatuses. This enables collective or aggregate processing of a multiple function request such that any one of the available multifunction apparatuses processes the request.

Independent claim 14 recites, "processing units that process requests received from multifunction machines" and "an assigning unit that assigns the request processing unit to the multifunction machine based on the request", where "a completion-of-assignment notification... indicating that processing of the request is possible" is sent to the multifunction machine. As also recited in claim 14, the present invention "cancels the assignment of the request processing unit to the multifunction machine when the request is not received within a predetermined amount of time". Independent claim 21 also recited similar features.

Independent claim 22 also recites, "assigning a processing request to a usable multifunction apparatus" based on "operation content of the request", and transmitting a notification indicative of the assignment to the usable multifunction apparatus."

Independent claim 24 recites, "a plurality of request processing units that process a request received from at least one of the multifunction machines" and "assigns at least one of the request processing units to the multifunction machine based on the request."

It is submitted that the independent claims are patentable over the cited references.

For at least the above-mentioned reasons, the claims depending from the independent claims are patentably distinguishable over the cited references. The dependent claims are also independently patentable. For example, as recited in claim 18, "recording "utilizing situation information received from the plurality of multifunction machines" and that is transmitted "when any one of nodes makes a request for transmitting the utilizing situation information." The cited references, alone or in combination these features of claim 18.

Therefore, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION:

There being no further outstanding objections or rejections, it is submitted that the application is in condition for allowance. An early action to that effect is courteously solicited.

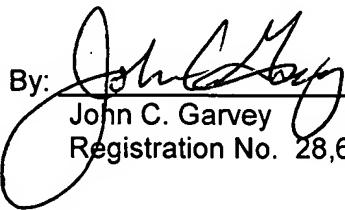Finally, if there are any formal matters remaining after this response, the Examiner is

requested to telephone the undersigned to attend to these matters.

If there are any additional fees associated with filing of this Amendment, please charge the same to our Deposit Account No. 19-3935.

Respectfully submitted,

STAAS & HALSEY LLP

Date: _____ 11-3-05 _____   By: _____

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